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VP-final modals and Pied Piping in S.E.Asian

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0. Introduction

This paper attempts to provide an account of a rather odd distributional patterning found with certain modal verbs in a number of genetically unrelated languages of East and S.E.Asia. In a group of otherwise fully regular head-initial SVO languages a particular modal verb is consistently found to occur in an odd predicate-final position, posing a strong empirical challenge to Cinque's (1997) Universal Base Hypothesis of clausal structure. The paper first introduces the relevant cross-linguistic paradigm, suggesting that a single 'irregular' structure has in fact been borrowed extensively into a variety of neighbouring languages, and then proceeds with a detailed syntactic investigation of contemporary Thai. An analysis is ultimately arrived at which makes crucial reference to aspects of the informational structure of the modal constructions in question and argues that the surface forms attested are actually derived from fully regular underlying structures via a process of focus-driven light predicate raising. The analysis is then also shown to be supported by significant diachronic evidence from Early and Middle Chinese.

1. The paradigm

In SVO Thai, it is found that modals regularly occur in standard positions preceding the VP (as in example(1)) with the exception of a single modal element meaning to be able/can which occurs *after* the verb as in (2):

- (1) Daeng **aat-ca/doong/khong** maa *Thai*
Daeng may/must/is-sure-to come
'Daeng may/must/is sure to come.'
- (2) khaw khian **dai** *Thai*
he write can
'He can write.'

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occur in Modern Mandarin, they are commonly found in Middle Chinese up until the 13thC, as in (9):

- (9) yi ren ji de *Middle Chinese*
one person play can
'One person can play (it).'

Taking Middle Chinese to be the original source of the modal allows one to posit a plausible route of transfer into the other languages of the group which simultaneously allows for an explanation of the differences in pronunciation observed. First of all it is known that the Tai people originally inhabited S.E.China up until the 13thC when they migrated out to modern Thailand; they were therefore in the Chinese speaking area precisely at the time when the modal structure existed in Middle Chinese and migrated away just before its decline, a highly suggestive fact. It is also believed that the Chinese modal was pronounced as dei at this time, so the sound change to dai is relatively minor. That to Cambodian baan is obviously greater, but can be explained by the fact that Thai developed a second post-verbal modal with the same properties as dai but pronounced ben, hence this is arguably the form which got borrowed into neighbouring Cambodian during the many years of Thai-Cambodian cultural exchange. The Vietnamese form düək with its syllable-final voiceless stop is clearly closer to Cantonese dak and may be taken to reflect borrowing from Chinese at an earlier period when it is known that syllable-final stops were still common in the language.

There is consequently not unreasonable motivation for assuming that a process of borrowing and onward transfer has indeed resulted in the creation of a regional typological feature of some significance - the occurrence of a *post*-verbal modal in a set of otherwise fully regular head-initial V-O languages.

2. Cinque (1997) and the Universal Base Hypothesis

The patterning observed above is not only odd but presents a serious empirical challenge to the idea that clausal architecture is in a large way predetermined to follow some universal blue-print - the Universal Base Hypothesis argued for at length in Cinque (1997). There it is suggested that the ordering of tense, modality and aspectual projections is universally fixed across languages and that all such elements will always occur hierarchically arranged in such a way in a functional super-structure in the clause external to the lexical descriptive core, the VP. The modal paradigm noted here for Thai and Vietnamese etc strongly seems to go against such predictions - whereas modals are expected to occur dominating the VP and hence to its left in all these V-O languages, the potential modal is consistently found to occur in a *post*-verbal position and so might even appear to be *within* the VP. In what follows, the structure of these modal sentences is closely examined in order to determine what underlying factors might give rise to their

apparent 'deviance' and whether they do indeed constitute genuine counter-examples to the universalist hypothesis.

3. Thai

One possible way of avoiding the conclusion that these modals falsify the Universal Base Hypothesis would of course be to suggest that the modal element in Cantonese, Thai etc is actually a *suffix* attached to the verb, as for example in Japanese - example (11) raising up with the verb at LF to be 'checked' and licensed by some higher functional head which would indeed dominate the VP:

- (11) hanas - e - ru *Japanese*
 speak - Potential - Tense
 'can speak'.

However, a brief inspection of other data indicates that this is not a possible analysis as many elements may actually intervene between the verb and the modal, as in the Thai example (12):

- (12) khun pai kap khaw phrung-nii **dai**
 you go with him tomorrow can
 'You can go with him tomorrow.'

One must therefore conclude that dai here is an independent modal verb. The post-verbal position it occurs in may then seem to constitute a genuine problem for the universalist hypothesis, which is otherwise very well supported. Considering the patterning further however, and staying with Thai as a representative of the paradigm, there are a number of vital clues which indicate that the surface position of the modal is *not* in fact within the VP but somehow higher. The first of these relates to *question-forms*; yes-no questions are answered in the affirmative by repetition of the highest verbal element in any string, i.e. the verb which is associated with the finite specification of the clause, as in (13):

- (13) phom doong pai mai A: doong
 I must go Q must
 'Must I go?' 'Yes.'

In dai-sentences we find that an answer-form consists in the repetition of dai rather than the linearly first lexical verb, indicating that it is dai which is the hierarchically higher verbal element associated with the finiteness of the clause rather than the lexical verb, despite the surface ordering, this being illustrated in (14):

- (14) khaw phuut phasaa thai **dai** mai A1: **dai** A2: *phuut
 he speak language thai can Q can speak
 'Can he speak Thai?' 'Yes.'

The position of *sentential negation* in dai-sentences also offers a vital clue as to the structure of the clause; sentential negation occurs *immediately before dai*, and *following* the lexical verb and its object/adverbs, as in (15):

- (15) khaw phuut phasaa thai mai dai
 he speak language thai NEG can
 'He cannot speak Thai.'

If one makes the fairly standard assumption that sentential negation occurs external to and higher than the VP, then it is not possible to suggest that there is a VP constituent in (15) containing both the lexical verb and dai as this would then simultaneously also contain the sentential negation. Consequently dai would again *not* seem to be inside the VP.

The patterning of *constituent negation* provides further information. In (16) the negation *only* has scope over the underlined string and critically *not* over the modal dai:

- (16) khun mai pai kap khaw dai
 you NEG go with him can
 You can (choose) not to go with him.

In order to account for this, one must assume that negation in (16) does not c-command dai, and hence that the underlined string in (16) is a constituent which excludes dai.

Putting this information together, that the modal dai is not simply lower down in the VP headed by the lexical verb and actually is the element interpreted as finite and so relating to the tense specification of the clause, one might suggest that these structures in fact contain *sentential subjects*, i.e. that all of the material preceding dai in (16) is predicated of dai as its subject. In such a sentential subject structure dai would be the 'finite' higher verbal element relating to Tense and constituent negation would indeed not c-command dai, accounting for the interpretation of (16).

However, despite a certain initial plausibility, there are reasons to believe that a sentential subject analysis is not in fact appropriate here. The first of these has to do with selectional restrictions. Root modals (as opposed to epistemics) clearly impose selectional restrictions on their subjects and may be taken to assign some kind of theta role to them. (17) below is odd in both Thai and English as the modal dai/can/be able requires a +animate subject to assign its theta role to:

- (17) ??fon dok dai
 rain fall can
 ??'The rain is able to/can fall.'

Considering (15) or (16) above, if the pronominal ‘you/he’ were to be analyzed as being inside a sentential subject it should not be possible for dai to assign its theta role to this position, as there is in general no possible theta/predicational relation between a predicate and an element which occurs inside the subject of that predicate. So, for example, ‘be good’ may not be predicated of ‘John’ in (18) and (18) can therefore not entail (19):

(18) [That John is coming tomorrow] is good.

(19) John is good.

Further evidence arguing against a sentential subject analysis relates to *extraction asymmetries* which can be noted when comparing dai-sentences with clear sentential subject structures. Relativization (or topicalization) from the latter is fully unacceptable, as shown in (20):

(20) *phuu-chaai O_i thii [loon khop t_i] mai dii ko khuu..
 man Rel she associate with Neg good be-namely..
 ‘The man who that she associates with is bad is..(e.g. John)’

If dai-sentences were sentential subject structures, one would expect that extraction of an element preceding dai should result in a violation equivalent to that in (20). However, parallel relativization (or topicalization) with dai-sentences is perfectly acceptable, indicating that they are *not* structurally equivalent to sentential subject structures, this illustrated in (21):

(21) phuu-chaai O_i thii [loon khop t_i] mai dai ko khuu..
 man Rel she see Neg can is
 ‘The man who she may not date/see is ... (John)’

Relative scope facts in sentences containing multiple occurrences of modal elements also argue against a sentential subject analysis. In (22) the modal doong ‘must’ obligatorily takes scope over dai:

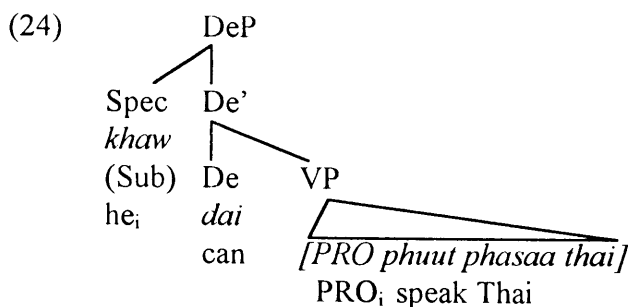
(22) khun doong phoo phuut phasaa thai dai nit-nooi
 you must suffice speak language thai can a little
 ‘You must be able to speak a little Thai.’

Supposing all the material preceding dai in (22) were to be analyzed as a sentential subject, then doong would not be in a position in which it would c-command dai and hence would not be expected to be able to take scope over it. Once again then this strongly suggests that dai-sentences have a structure quite different from that of sentential subjects.

4. dai-sentences as light predicate raising structures

The structure I would actually like to suggest is appropriate for dai-sentences is one in which dai heads a modal projection which selects a predicate VP as its complement and projects a Specifier filled here by the lexical subject NP. The modal phrase is labelled as 'DeP' as it is intended not just to be Thai-specific but to occur in all the languages under consideration here and represent a regular low alethic modal projection (the choice of 'de' as the label is meant to reflect the modal's suggested origins in Chinese). (24) is a representation of how the various parts of (23) are suggested to be base-generated, with a null pronominal PRO assumed present in SpecVP, controlled by the DP in SpecDeP:²

- (23) khaw phuut phasaa thai dai
 he speak language thai can
 'He can speak Thai.'



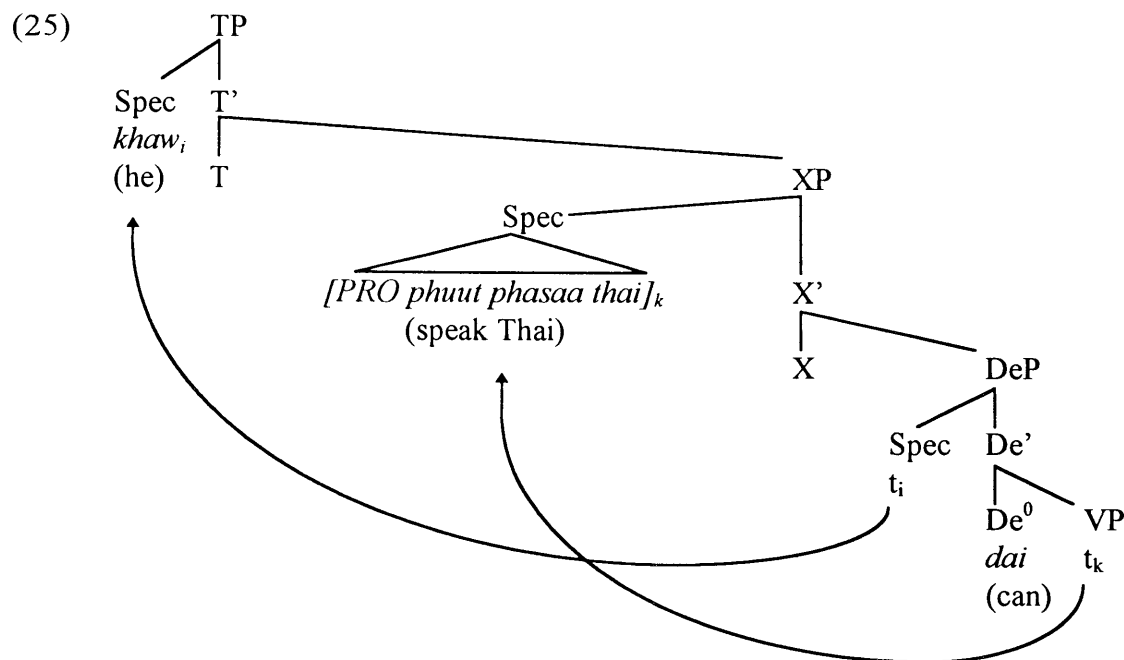
I would then like to suggest that a surface form such as (23) is derived from (24) via two applications of movement. The subject DP in SpecDeP will raise to SpecTP to satisfy the EPP and the predicate VP will raise to a position between T^0 and DeP as illustrated in (25) overleaf. The landing-site of this latter movement is not made explicit here; assuming the existence of a variety of higher modal projections as in Cinque, the VP may be taken to raise to the specifier of one of these projections (or alternatively adjoin to such a specifier position), and I simply label this projection as XP.

Such an analysis would seem able to capture all of the key properties of dai-sentences noted earlier, specifically:

- a) dai theta marks and constrains the choice of the lexical subject; here the subject is base-generated in SpecDeP where it receives its theta role from dai.

² (24) actually simplifies things somewhat. Following Cinque (1997) I assume that below modal projections there are first aspectual phrases of various types and then the VP (even if there are no overt aspect-heads). Consequently what is labelled as VP in (24) may in fact be as AspectPhrase of some type. Essentially all results here are the same whether the constituent is labelled as VP or as AspP with an empty Asp head, and so the former option is taken for simplicity.

- b) dai is suggested to be base-generated in a head position higher than that of the lexical verb in the VP; consequently it is dai which is the verbal element associated with Tense and which appears in answer-forms (and possibly dai or its features raise to T^0 at LF).
- c) There is no sentential subject structure; object relativization-extraction may take place out of the VP in its complement position, hence not causing any CED violation.



- d) The structure suggested allows a simple account of the negation facts; sentential negation is base-generated between the XP and DeP, hence higher than the VP. The fact that the lexical verb and its object appear higher than sentential negation is simply due to the movement of the VP. That it is a VP maximal projection rather than a head which moves also accounts for why there would seem to be no Head Movement Constraint violation when the lexical verb is found to precede Negation, noting that lexical verbs may otherwise *not* normally precede Negation. 'Constituent negation' will be base-generated between De^0 and the VP and raise together with the latter. Consequently it will not c-command dai, accounting for the lack of scope over dai.

- e) Sentences such as (22) with a second modal verb obligatorily taking scope over dai may be assigned a structure in which doong/must heads a higher modal phrase occurring between TP and the XP, so that the resulting c-command relations between the two modals in such a structure will straightforwardly account for their relative scopes.

Finally and importantly, in a structure such as (24/25) dai no longer is an exceptional modal occurring merged in a highly irregular VP-internal position and one is indeed able

to successfully maintain Cinque's universal base hypothesis. What is exceptional about dai and in need of explanation however is not its base-generated position but rather the movement of its complement VP, and this is now further examined below.³

5. A motivation for raising - focus and pre-supposition

If there are indeed good syntactic reasons to argue for the raising structure proposed, the question clearly arises as to *why* this movement should take place, what might be its motivation? A plausible explanation may possibly be given in terms of the particular informational structure of dai-sentences

A significant fact so far left un-mentioned is that under certain circumstances it is in fact possible for the object of the lexical verb to occur clause-finally *after* dai, as in (26), rather than immediately after the lexical verb as in all previous examples:

- (26) ..kwaa ja thaai **dai** sak-phaap-nung.
 ..before Irr. take can even picture one
 ..before I could take *even a single picture*,..

This may only happen however if the object is strongly *focused*. Furthermore if the object is so focused, it *must* occur in this position and is highly unnatural/unacceptable preceding dai. In addition to this one can also note that if no focused object follows dai, i.e. if dai is final in the clause, then dai itself automatically carries a focal stress. What can be concluded from this is that dai-sentences would always seem to be associated with some kind of focus. I would therefore now like to suggest that these focus-effects are indeed critically responsible for the 'exceptional' behaviour observed in dai-sentences and that the motivation and function of the proposed VP-raising is principally to *de-focus* the predicate by moving it away from the final focus position, allowing for either dai itself or alternatively an object following dai to receive the focus intonation and interpretation.

The force of dai-sentences is then to emphasize the possibility, ability or permission of carrying out a certain action (with stress on dai itself) or to emphasize a particular element relating to this possible action (with stress on a final object as in (26)). The VP predicate in a sense then represents *pre-supposed* information, while the new/focused information is the affirmation of the positive (or negative) possibility of the content of the predicate (or some element related to the predicate).

³ The analysis also allows for an explanation of two other sets of facts. First of all, NPIs are licensed by negation in dai-structures but not in clear sentential subjects. This can be explained by the suggestion that NPIs in the former structures originate in a position c-commanded by negation prior to raising of the VP whereas sentential subjects may be base-generated in their surface positions higher than negation. Secondly, a natural account of various ellipsis facts in dai-sentences is made available by the analysis put forward (see Simpson (1997) for further details)).

This view of dai-sentences is arguably supported by the fact that they occur with a high degree of frequency in negative sentences, questions and acts of granting permission, all instances where it may be argued that the content of the predicate is quite likely to be information presupposed in the discourse. This presuppositional nature of the predicate in dai-sentences is well captured and best translated by adding a stress to the modal in English equivalents, e.g:

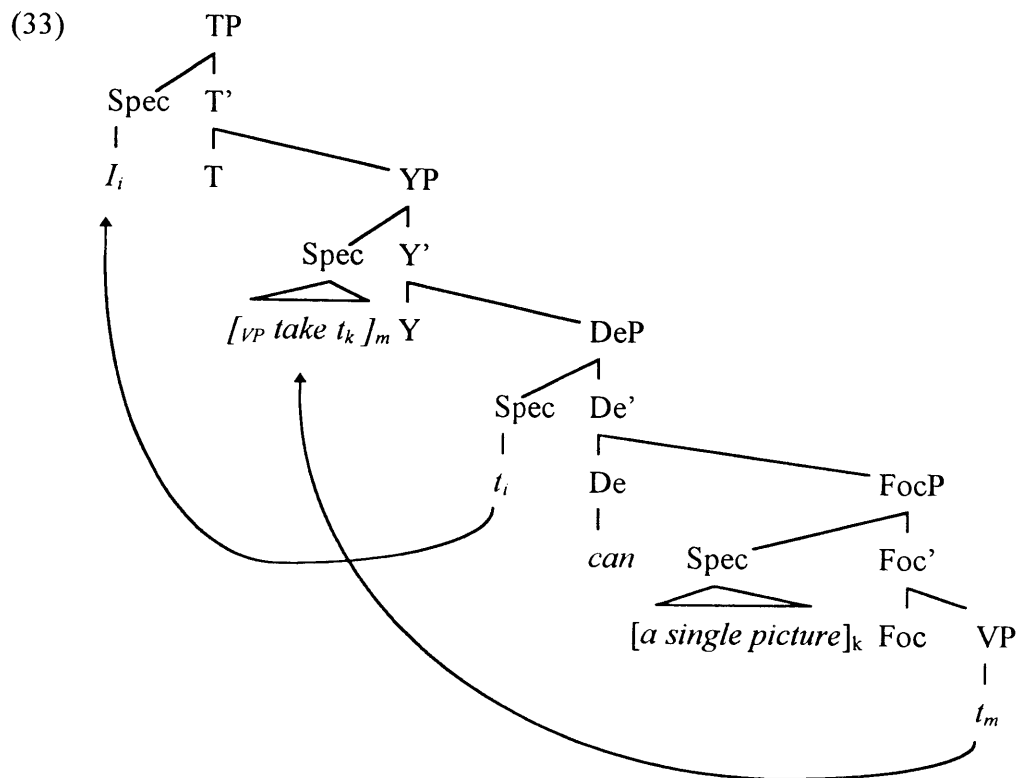
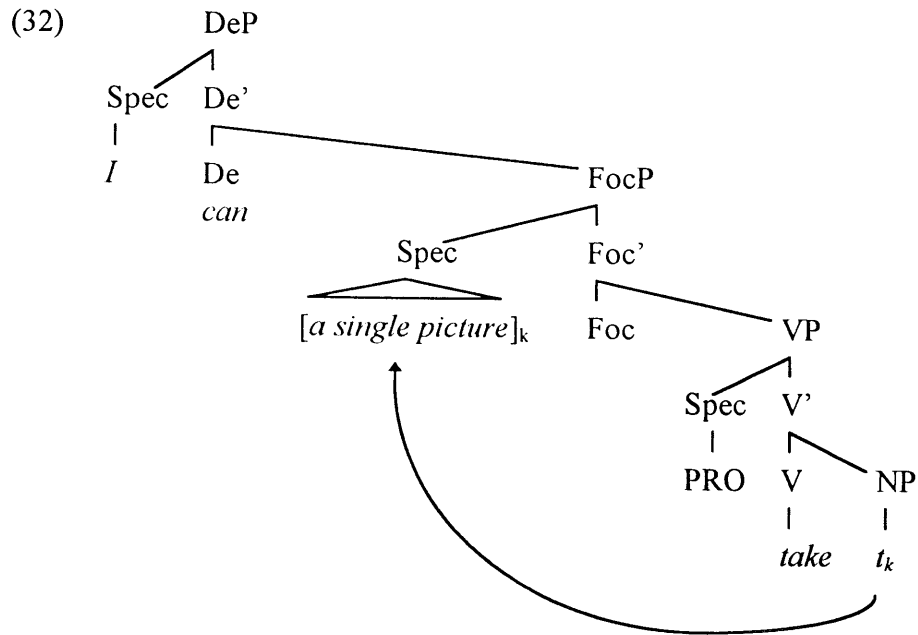
- | | | |
|------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| (27) | He CAN'T speak Thai. | (negative sentence) |
| (28) | CAN I invite him along? | (question) |
| (29) | You MAY indeed go to the movies. | (act of granting permission) |

Once the modal is stressed (as it is in Thai), one can only interpret the predicate in sentences such as these as being presupposed. Similar effects are found where the VP is actually raised in English, its content then also being pre-supposed, as in (30) and (31):⁴

- (30) [Speak Thai] I can't, I'm afraid to say.
 (31) [Go to the movies] you certainly may not!

If raising of the VP then occurs as proposed in order to de-focus it, it still needs to be explained how it is possible for a focused object to occur after dai - i.e. if the entire VP raises past the modal, how is it that the object can remain in final position (as in (26))? Here I would like to suggest that what is ultimately exceptional about the modal dai is that it actually selects for a focus projection as its complement, and that when a focused object follows dai it has in fact raised out of the VP to the Specifier of the FocusPhrase. This focus-movement will then be followed by VP-raising to the position preceding dai, as indicated in the sequence (32) and (33) (which use English glosses for the relevant Thai words in (26)):

⁴ See Cinque (1997) for further similar examples in Italian.



6. Middle Chinese and Old Chinese

A fairly detailed investigation of contemporary Thai then leads to an analysis of *dai*-sentences which offers a principled and coherent account of the otherwise puzzling post-

verbal position of this modal, one which also turns out to be quite in line with Cinque's universalist hypothesis. In introducing the paradigm earlier on it was suggested that these structures in Thai have in all likelihood actually been borrowed from Middle Chinese; consequently their syntactic properties might naturally be expected to be those of Middle Chinese de-constructions. Turning now back to earlier forms of Chinese one can find clear evidence of two basic types which both indicate that the syntax of Thai dai-constructions is indeed that of Middle Chinese de and add strong support to the proposed analysis of focus-related VP-raising.

First of all, if one considers the patterning of the object of the lexical verb in Middle Chinese de-constructions, it would indeed appear to mirror the distribution found in Thai and therefore arguably be dictated by the same presupposition/focus distinctions. As occurs frequently in Thai dai-structures, one often finds that the object is deleted/a *pro*, as in example (34). Because a *pro* may normally only be used where its content is already assumed and identifiable in the discourse, the regular occurrence of an object *pro* here *may* be argued to reflect the fact that the content of the whole VP including the object is presupposed in these structures:

- (34) yi ren ji de
 one person play can
 'One person can play (it).'

Where an object is overt but indefinite/unstressed it is found to occur 'raised' in the VP (i.e. sandwiched between the lexical verb and the modal de); examples such as (35) strongly resembling those in Thai:

- (35) shi qie [yao shou] bu de
 cause wife wave hand Neg can
 'It caused the wife not to be able to wave her hand.'

Finally one finds that strongly focused objects occur *after de*, exactly as in Thai:

- (36) cheng de ge shenme-bian shi?
 succeed can Cl what matter
 'What can one accomplish?'

A second set of data which support the proposals made on the basis of Thai comes from de-structures found earlier still in Old Chinese. In the preceding sections it has been shown that a variety of arguments all converge on the same conclusion, namely that the surface strings found in dai-sentences are actually derived from structures in which the modal underlyingly selects a VP complement to its right, this VP subsequently undergoing raising for reasons relating to focus. Turning to de-constructions in Old Chinese one significantly finds that at this period in its history de in fact *preceded* the VP, showing precisely what has been argued to be the base-generated form of de and dai-sentences in

Middle Chinese and Thai, and indicating that the VP/predicate clearly was a (rightward) complement to *de* in its origins.

- (37) Zikuai bu **de** [_{VP} yu ren yan]
 Zikuai Neg permit give other Yan
 'Zikuai is not allowed to give others the state of Yan.'

- (38) ni **de** [_{VP} ru men ye]
 you can enter door Prt
 'You can enter.'

Returning once again to Middle Chinese, Sun (1996) reveals that such *de*-initial (*de*-VP) structures actually remained present for some time alongside other post-verbal *de*-constructions, so there was consequently a period in Middle Chinese when both types of *de*-VP and VP-*de* structures simultaneously occurred. One can therefore suggest that the later *de*-final (VP-*de*) type found only in Middle Chinese developed from the earlier *de*-initial (*de*-VP) forms quite plausibly as a stylistic variant triggered by the informational-discourse reasons already outlined - the rightward VP complement became raised whenever there was a need to de-focus it. This raising was clearly optional in early Middle Chinese (when it may be assumed that not all *de*-sentences necessarily had predicates whose content was presupposed), but later became obligatory, at least in Thai, as part of the meaning of such constructions.

Consequently then diachronic data from Old and Middle Chinese strongly seem to bear out and support the analysis developed from contemporary Thai and can be suggested to indicate that a period where there existed competing stylistic forms ultimately led to the establishment of one of these as the sole and exclusive option, conceivably as a classic result of 'over-use' of this particular variant.

7. Extensions - Scandinavian Object-Shift

In Simpson (1997) it is suggested that similar long-term 'over-use' of the modal construction in Vietnamese and Cantonese may well have led to a further re-analysis of the motivation behind object-raising out of the VP. In northern Viet dialects simple non-focussed but *definite* DPs may regularly occur after the modal, while in Cantonese all *full* DPs are found in the post-modal position, possibly in the Specifier of an Aspect Phrase where objective case is licensed. Some speakers of Cantonese report however that *pronominal* objects may in fact still occur preceding the modal. This is not entirely unexpected given the suggestion that any material preceding the modal will be presupposed information - pronouns always constitute old information and are only

infrequently subject to focussing.⁵ It also immediately brings to mind the patterning found in object-shift constructions in Scandinavian and an unsolved problem relating to the apparent dependence of object-shift on verb-movement. As noted by Holmberg (1986) and others, objects may only appear shifted before Negation in Scandinavian if the verb occurs raised as well, and it is furthermore only *pronominal* objects which may undergo this raising in mainland Scandinavian, as e.g. in (39) and (40) from Swedish:

- (39) Jag kysste_i henne_k inte t_i t_k
 I kissed her not
 'I didn't kiss her.'
 (40) *Jag kysste_i Elsa_k inte t_i t_k

This dependence of object-shift on verb-movement was initially assumed to be universal and was accordingly built into the mechanics of Chomsky's (1993) Minimalist Paper. However, languages such as Dutch and Japanese have shown that objects may indeed raise without there being any necessary verb-movement. Furthermore, the facts in Scandinavian are somewhat more complex than originally reported and non-pronominal DPs in (at least) Norwegian *may* in fact shift over many adverbials but apparently not over Negation. If UG does allow for object-shift without verb-movement, the core of the patterning in Scandinavian remains without explanation, i.e. why should it be that pronominal object-shift over *Negation* is only possible when the verb also appears moved? This is however essentially the same pattern which has been reported here in the S.E. Asian modal constructions - one only finds an object DP preceding the modal if the verb also occurs higher. Significantly it cannot be suggested that there is any verb-movement taking place in Thai etc as verbs in these languages normally may *not* raise over negation and certainly should not raise over a modal head as this would violate the HMC/Minimal Link Condition. It is therefore tempting to try and explain the Scandinavian pattern on the basis of the S.E. Asian model and suggest that objects will only occur shifted over Negation in Scandinavian when the whole VP is raised, this simply accounting for the apparent necessity of verb-movement - there is in fact no independent verb-movement and the verb instead moves together with its object as a single VP unit.

Making the parallel with S.E. Asian even more suggestive is the further fact reported in Diesing (1996) that unshifted object DPs following Negation receive a contrastive *focussed* interpretation, just as post-modal objects do in Thai, as e.g. in (41):

- (41) Jon keypti ekki bokina *Icelandic*
 Jon bought not book-the
 Jon didn't buy the book.

⁵ Given the availability of object pro in Cantonese one would actually expect for this rather than an overt pronoun to occur in the pre-modal de-focussed VP as overt pronouns often are used only where emphasis is required. This is in fact what happens for the majority of speakers and a familiar unstressed object is simply left non-overt rather than being referred to with a pronoun.

One may consequently attempt to argue for a similar derivation to that outlined for Thai - either the entire VP is shifted over Negation for de-focusing, or the object is raised out of the VP to a low focus projection following Negation and the VP-remnant is raised higher still. Such initial proposals certainly leave unanswered a number of questions, but the obvious surface parallels between the different sets of language makes it interesting to at least explore a unitary type of analysis.

7. Summarizing remarks

This paper began by arguing for the existence of a wide-spread modal paradigm connecting a number of genetically-unrelated languages as a result of large-scale lexico-syntactic borrowing. It was pointed out that the occurrence of this modal series would also seem to present a rather strong empirical challenge to the Universal Base Hypothesis argued for recently in Cinque (1996). Subsequent detailed investigation of the syntactic properties of contemporary Thai however provided much synchronic evidence for an analysis in which a large chunk of the clause in fact undergoes raising from a fully regular base structure which does accord with the Universalist Hypothesis. The motivation for this predicate raising was crucially suggested to be a need to *de-focus* the VP as presupposed information and shown to receive considerable diachronic support from Middle and Early Chinese. Finally it was indicated that aspects of the paradigm seem quite reminiscent of object-shift phenomena in Scandinavian, suggesting that it might be appropriate to attempt to analyze (certain) instances of object-shift in Scandinavian as focus-related VP-shift.

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